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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 004004

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SHIA IMAMS IN FAVOR OF CONSTITUTION, BUT THEIR FLOCKS HAVE RESERVATIONS

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT FORD FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In a conversation on September 26 two moderate Shia Imams, both followers of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, told PolOff they would vote in favor of the constitution in the October 15 elections. They said they had set up an organization to tell more Iraqis about the constitution. Some people who pray at their mosques, however, have reservations about the document. END
SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Sheikh Ayad al Ekabi, imam of the Al Rasool mosque and Sayed Faris al Jazaeri, imam of the Al Muntather mosque, both located in the Al Zafaraniya neighborhood of Baghdad, said they had set up a new organization called "Rafidai al Iraq" with the help of the U.S. Institute For Peace. They said the organization has so far held six conferences to promote knowledge about the Iraqi draft constitution. Sheikh Ayad told PolOff he has been encouraging people to read the draft several times, telling them, "when you first read the draft, you will hate it." He said he also tells them that by the time they read it the fourth time, they will "love it so much they will want to tell others about it." These conferences are largely informational in nature; the imams provide information and answer questions from the attendees. The imams do tell people they will vote in favor of the constitution, but they tell Iraqis they should simply learn as much as possible about the constitution and make up their own minds.

¶3. (C) Sheikh Ayad and Sayed Faris told PolOff the most common reservations Iraqi Shiites have regarding the constitution are federalism, the distribution of natural resources, and how one obtains Iraqi citizenship. Many Iraqis tell them that federalism is the first step toward the break-up of Iraq. They also worry that natural resources will not be distributed fairly, and Baghdad will be left without adequate supplies of oil and natural gas. These Iraqis also feel that children born abroad who have only one Iraqi parent will not know about Iraq and therefore should not be granted full citizenship. Sheikh Ayad and Sayed Faris said many Shiites fear that, if these issues are not handled properly, the unity of Iraq will be threatened. Poloff said that the constitution was the best way to ensure the future stability and unity of Iraq.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Both Imams report over 100 attendees at Friday prayers at their respective mosques. We will encourage them to use their organization to spread a message of moderation to a broader range of Baghdad Shia.

Khalilzad